

Six Ways to Get the Most out of Your Next Virtual Course

Middle seats on airplanes, stale boxed lunches, and time away from work.

What are three reasons to make your next educational experience a virtual one?

The reality is that virtual education (or online learning, e-learning, on-demand education—whichever name you choose) is becoming more popular every year. [Study](#) after [study](#) shows that colleges are seeing a surge in online course enrollment, with convenience and connectivity often at the top of the student's wish list. [Massive open online courses \(MOOCs\)](#) and [competency-based learning](#) continue to redesign the learning landscape on campuses—and beyond—around the globe.

Great, you might be saying. College students and high school students are learning in new ways. How will virtual education change my life? What's in it for me?

Virtual education likely is changing your life already—even if you are a technological laggard and prefer to get actual newspaper ink on your hands every Sunday morning. [Nearly 4 out of 5 US companies now use e-learning](#) as part of their training efforts. And projections [show the e-learning industry tripling to a \\$325 billion industry by 2025](#). The reality is that virtual education is everywhere.

And that includes IHI, where we now offer six different online courses with coaching—a model that combines dynamic expert content, meaningful project work, and a social learning environment. We offer courses on finding joy in work, running a quality improvement project, becoming a better leader, conducting a root cause analysis and action review, leading and organizing a group of stakeholders, and making change happen. Each course includes several multimedia-filled lessons released on a bi-weekly schedule to promote pacing and repetition, encourage connections between learners around the world, and offer deadlines to increase motivation. Expert faculty teach the courses and connect with learners in designated Facebook group pages to share ideas, offer support, and give advice.

Whether you take one of these new online courses with coaching or any kind of virtual education, here are six ways you can get the most out of your next e-learning experience:

1. **Set a schedule.** We all have busy lives. The promise of “things will clear up a bit next week/month/year” never seems to come true. To combat the busyness, try setting a schedule for yourself. Maybe you're a morning person and learning for 30 minutes will energize you for the day ahead. Or maybe you're a night owl who likes learning about run charts before bed. Whether it's morning, noon, or night, set aside some time on the same day/time each week to help learning become a habit.
2. **Introduce yourself to other learners.** It's hard to remember that your screen is, in fact, a gateway to hundreds and sometimes thousands of other learners around the world. Those learners are often in the same position as you—they have the same questions, the same concerns, the same obstacles to overcome. Connect with them and your educational experience will improve instantly.
3. **Ask lots of questions.** That improvement project you can't get off the ground? The negative feeling that permeates staff meeting on Monday morning? The one small tweak that you know will make a world of difference for your patients and your colleagues? Other learners are experiencing the exact same issues and looking for some ideas and solutions. So be the one to

ask the question—of faculty, on the group page, in the survey. Questions yield answers, which yield value for you.

4. **Go back and review the content.** We often include lots of multimedia content in our courses—videos, audio clips, additional resources. Whenever a piece of learning doesn't resonate with you or, conversely, if it really does, go back and explore it. That's one of the key benefits of virtual learning. You can't rewind a live call and you can't ask an expert faculty to come back to work with you, but virtual learning is always by your side.
5. **Don't worry if you miss a deadline.** We've all been there. You miss one deadline. Then another. Then ... "it's too late. I can't catch up. I give up." We all have unexpected projects and events that can thwart the best intentions. So, what to do if that happens to you? Find a way back into the education. Ask a question, attend a live call, or watch a video that helps solve an issue you're facing in your daily work. Get something of value from the educational experience and don't feel bad about a missed deadline or a course you didn't finish. You'll have more opportunities in the future.
6. **Practice what you're learning.** Learning for the sake of learning is, inherently, a good thing. A good book. An artist's life. An entertaining video. But learning to change something, to produce results, is the real value. Each of IHI's online courses with coaching includes a project that aligns with the content and encourages learners to put their education into action. Those projects help the learning stick—and, in the end, make positive changes for your workplace and your patients.